

EDITORIAL

Looking Toward the Future of Traumatic Stress Studies

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Editor

As the first academic journal devoted entirely to trauma-related content, the *Journal of Traumatic Stress (JTS)* holds a special place in the evolution of the study of traumatic stress. Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was introduced into the diagnostic nomenclature in 1980 (American Psychiatric Association, 1980). In 1988, Charles Figley published the first volume of *JTS*, opening the inaugural issue with an article in which he proposed that a field of traumatic stress studies had emerged. *JTS* chronicled the field's evolution. Under the wise leadership of Figley, and then Bonnie Green and Dean Kilpatrick, the content was wide-ranging, as it should be. Trauma affects all aspects of an individual's function and well-being and has systemic effects on families, communities, and society. Topics ranged from assessment to epidemiology to neurobiology to treatment, including psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioral, and pharmacological approaches. Populations studied included adults, children, and older adults. The target audience encompassed all disciplines, representing the field as a whole.

MY VISION FOR THE FUTURE

I believe strongly that it is our responsibility to continue to reflect the field's diverse focus and constituency, using our unique position as the journal of the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies, ISTSS. The Society is a multidisciplinary international professional organization that focuses broadly on supporting the study and treatment

of trauma. My vision for *JTS* is that we should continue to be multidisciplinary and international in our scope, too.

In addition, I think we should help shape the field by focusing on issues of particular importance. Whenever we believe a topic needs attention, either because we are not receiving sufficient submissions on that topic or because highlighting it is important, we will promote it in a Special Section or a Special Issue. The special content may be obtained from a variety of sources. For example, we have several initiatives in various stages of planning. In this issue, we have included a Call for Papers on the biology of trauma. Although this area represents some of the most exciting work on trauma today, we rarely receive submissions with biological content. Consequently, we publish few such articles and thereby may give the impression that there is a lack of interest in doing so. With a Call for Papers, we can help break this cycle and enhance our offerings to readers. Our next issue will include a Special Section of articles selected from the first Conference in Trauma Research Methods, CITRM, which was held in conjunction with the ISTSS Annual Meeting in 2004. We also are planning a Special Section that consists of articles from the plenary talks on dissemination that were given at the 2005 ISTSS meeting.

Since being named Editor-Elect at the end of 2003, I have had the opportunity to discuss the *Journal* with many of our readers. Although the feedback I have received is quite varied and even contradictory, a consistent theme is

a perceived lack of clinically relevant material specifically aimed at a practice-oriented audience. My response has always been something on the order of “We publish what we receive,” not to be defensive, but merely to assert the fact that we do not receive many practice-oriented submissions. I want to use the position afforded by my editorial role to communicate that we welcome such material. We also welcome case studies that present unique information about trauma or that showcase a novel treatment or novel application of existing treatments.

In recent years, the number of submissions has risen substantially, increasing both the difficulty of getting published and the editorial workload. Several years ago, Dean Kilpatrick undertook a policy of rejecting without review papers that we judged unlikely to be published even after revision or that did not make a sufficient contribution to the literature. Although undoubtedly disappointing to authors whose submissions have been rejected this way, these initial rejections have helped us spend more time on potentially publishable manuscripts and enhance the rigor of our content. However, I do not believe in rigor at all costs. A methodologically solid study may tell us nothing that we do not already know. Therefore, I am willing to take some risks. We will consider flawed studies that yield new and exciting information provided that these flaws are not so great as to prevent any meaningful interpretation and the authors appropriately contextualize their interpretation in light of the flaws.

CHANGES AT THE JOURNAL

At the end of December 2004, ISTSS signed a contract with a new publisher, John Wiley & Sons. We are excited about our relationship with Wiley and feel that it is a great benefit to ISTSS and to our readership. However, because the official transition occurred so late in the year, we were unable to receive manuscripts online until the end of June. Some authors experienced delays in the processing of their manuscripts as we transitioned from the online system used by the previous publisher to a temporary e-mail-based system and, finally, to the new Wiley system. The new system is fully operational now and has dramatically increased

the efficiency of the review process. We deeply appreciate the patience and diligence of our authors and reviewers in learning the system with us.

In January 2006, the *Journal* began a policy of using unmasked review—that is, allowing reviewers to know the identity of authors during the review process. This policy represents a major change from the past and was not made without careful consideration of the issues involved. The impetus for the change arose from several sources. Because many journals now use unmasked review, that started me thinking, “If it’s good enough for the *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, it could be good enough for us.” There is growing empirical evidence, including data from randomized trials, that unmasking does not increase bias or affect decisions more generally (e.g., Justice et al., 1998; van Rooyen, Godlee, Evans, Smith, & Black, 1998). There also is evidence that masking often is not achieved anyway (Cho et al., 1998); reviewers are surprisingly good at correctly guessing author identity, particularly if an author is well known (Justice et al., 1998). In our relatively small field, I imagine the guessing would be exceptionally accurate. Using unmasked review also increases our efficiency because it requires fewer steps in the processing of manuscripts; in fact, I find it telling that our Web-based management system, which is one of the most widely used systems in the world, is designed for unmasked review. My own experience with unmasked review has been positive. As a reviewer, I think if anything I am fairer when I know the identity of the author whose work I am reviewing. As an author I feel I have been treated fairly at other journals that use unmasked review.

We feel that this change will benefit the *Journal* and authors alike. Authors who are concerned about potential bias if their name is revealed to reviewers are encouraged to use the option of specifying “nonpreferred reviewers” during the submission process—no justification is required. This regular feature of the system is open to all authors, with or without masked review. Authors who prefer masked review may request it instead. In all cases, authors also may specify “preferred reviewers” as well. Details may be found on the *Journal* Web site at <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/jabout/109882595/ForAuthors.html>.

The editorial team represents both constancy and change. I regret that I did not have much time to work as Editor with Associate Editor Chris Brewin, who had to retire in mid-2005 as a result of increased work demands. I am fortunate to continue to have the able guidance of Fran Norris as Deputy Editor (and coordinator of Statistical Review) and Chip Benight, Chris Frueh, and Terri Weaver as Associate Editors. My good fortune extends to the new Associate Editors I have been able to recruit: Judy Cohen and Daniel Weiss in 2005 and Tim Dalgleish in 2006. I also have capable editorial staff: Sherry Wilcox, who oversees the general management and review process; Liz Forshay, who oversees production; and Laurie Slone, who is our statistical review assistant.

IN CLOSING

We seek any content that makes a contribution, that moves the field forward and does not merely replicate what 6 (or 16) other studies have shown. Can we be too general in our approach? I do not think so as long as we ensure that we publish work of the highest quality and encourage authors to discuss the implications of their work substantively. Is it unrealistic to expect that we can appeal equally to a researcher who uses brain imaging to study the effects of PTSD and a dynamically oriented therapist in private practice? Again, I do not think so. I aim to promote a cross-fertilization of ideas, so that we all learn

something from one another regardless of our primary interests.

I am grateful to Dean Kilpatrick for his leadership as Editor. Dean's tenure was challenging because he served at a time when the field entered a more mature stage. Interest widened, but so did scrutiny and controversy. He handled it all with his southern brand of wisdom and irreverence, with fairness and clear vision. In doing so, he has presented me with an exceptional opportunity to advance the study of trauma through the *Journal of Traumatic Stress*. I welcome working with all of you to achieve this goal.

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